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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION VIEW FROM THE SRI LANKAN FRONT LINE:
VAVUNIYA AND MINNERIYA

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle. Reason: 1.4 (B,D)

SUMMARY

11. (C/NF) During a mid-October trip to the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) Headquarters near the front lines, interlocutors from Vavuniya said the situation there and at the Omanthai Entry/Exit Point demarcating Tiger-controlled territory was relatively calm, but expressed concern at continued ceasefire violations. Interlocutors in the East said there has been an increase in Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) activity.

In both locations, it was predicted that LTTE activity, both military and propaganda, would increase prior to the upcoming November 17 presidential election. Interlocutors from the SLA continued to express frustration at their inability to react to Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) violations by the LTTE, in the perceived absence of a response from the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM). In Vavuniya, local officials are working with the SLA to ensure that access to the polling stations from uncleared (i.e. LTTE-controlled) areas is streamlined. The LTTE's reaction to the presidential campaign, whether they will support one candidate over another, or try to impede voters in the uncleared areas from voting remains a mystery.

END SUMMARY

CFA: ADVANTAGE LTTE?

12. (C/NF) On October 18 the DCM, accompanied by CAO, DATT, SAO, and RSO visited Vavuniya and met with military and civil officials. The SLA in Vavuniya oversees 163 kilometers of the Forward Defensive Line (FDL) from Vankulai in the west to Kokkuthduuvi in the east. The AOR is home to more than 1.67 million Sri Lankans and has a majority 73% Sinhalese population, with Tamils representing 13% and Muslims another 13%. The Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) opened the Omanthai Entry/Exit Point in Vavuniya and has resulted in greater prosperity in the region and increased traffic, as the checkpoint is the primary crossing point between cleared south and uncleared north areas. The CFA also brought, according to Major General Paarami S.B. Kulatunge, Commander of Sri Lanka Forces at Vavuniya, an increase in LTTE propaganda and infiltration into the Vavuniya area south of the Entry/Exit point. The LTTE has six political offices in the cleared areas of Vavuniya. Kulatunge commented that there is little enforcement of the CFA by the SLMM, complaining that the SLA can report violations to the SLMM but do nothing else.

13. (C/NF) Major General Kulatunge painted a dire portrait of the military situation on the ground in the area under his command in the event of all out war. He reported that the LTTE across the FDL has the advantage of knowing where army fixed positions are located. According to Kulatunge, the Tigers can wreak significant damage if they ever decide to break the CFA because the LTTE has gathered intelligence on SLA FDL strong points and LTTE equipment can jam SLA radios. While acknowledging CFA violations such as intimidation of Tamil and Muslim businesses in the cleared area, the use of radio communication, and occasional abductions and political assassinations, Kulatunge nonetheless views Vavuniya as relatively violence-free compared with other areas in the north and east. In the past six months, there have been 9 killed, 2 injured and 57 abducted by the LTTE. SLA interlocutors stressed that they do not foresee the Tigers attempting to provoke military hostilities in Vavuniya primarily because the CFA - and the taxes the Tigers can collect on travelers crossing the checkpoint - are good business. For the first three quarters of 2005, the LTTE tax revenue from the Omanthai checkpoint was 1.627 billion rupees (approx. \$16,300,000 USD), representing a substantial increase from the 1.246 billion rupees (approx. \$12,400,000 USD) that was collected over the entire 2004 calendar year.

AGA SEES LTTE LASSITUDE
THIS ELECTION BUT SLA READY FOR "UNCLEARED" VOTERS

14. (C) DCM and delegation also met with Vavuniya Additional Government Agent (AGA), P.S.M. Charles. Charles said that Vavuniya has experienced increasing prosperity since the CFA due to a booming trade between cleared and uncleared areas and the investment of many newly returned Sri Lankans who fled the country during the height of the war. Unlike Kulatunge, Charles did not focus on the CFA violations in the cleared area of Vavuniya.

15. (C) Charles said she did not know how the upcoming presidential election will play out in the area. She predicted, however, that the November 17 polls would not attract as many voters from the uncleared areas as the April 2004 general election did because the LTTE felt it had a greater stake in the outcome then and thus encouraged participation from the uncleared area. Neither candidate in the upcoming presidential election will elicit the same support by the LTTE, she speculated.

16. (C/NF) Contrary to what the AGA said, the SLA Commander at Omanthai said they are preparing for 50,000 voters to cross from LTTE-controlled territory for the presidential election - up from 30,000 in the 2004 general election. (On average, approximately 10,000 people and 2,000 - 3,000 vehicles cross the Entry/Exit point on a working day.) He reported that his troops at the checkpoint would facilitate quick crossing to the polling stations, which are to be set up one kilometer inside the cleared area. An additional perimeter will be added after the polling station, where those traveling to the cleared area for reasons other than to vote will be subject to additional security checks.

ALL NOT SO QUIET
ON THE EASTERN FRONT

17. (C/NF) Major General T.T.R. De Silva, Commander of Security Forces (East), and Brigadier Rohan M. Jayasinghe, Brigadier General Staff (formerly Defense Attach at Sri Lankan Embassy in Washington, DC) met the delegation at the Security Forces Headquarters (East) in Minneriya in Polonnaruwa district later the same day. De Silva told the delegation that the Karuna faction has been very active in the east (Polonnaruwa borders Batticaloa District), estimating that there are between 200-300 combatants in the area. The LTTE has repeatedly sent cadres to attack the Karuna faction and harass the SLA, in an effort to show a relationship between Karuna's forces and the SLA, De Silva asserted. He told the delegation that recently the SLA spotted 35 Karuna cadres in the area and shortly thereafter spotted a large number of LTTE (Wanni) cadres that appeared to be tracking the Karuna cadres. The violation of the CFA was reported to the SLMM, but no action was taken. Between April 2004 and October 2005, the Karuna faction has killed 107 LTTE (Wanni) cadres and the LTTE has killed 48 Karuna cadres in the East. Three-fourths of the killings occurred in LTTE-controlled areas. Since the CFA was signed in 2002, the LTTE has committed approximately 159 murders, 190 attempted murders, and 326 abductions in the East; however the exact figures are unknown since many attacks go unreported.

18. (C/NF) De Silva and Jayasinghe predicted that prior to the upcoming presidential election, there would be a surge in LTTE activity, including forced recruitment, military training of civilians, and attacks on small military and police posts. The SLA also believes that in preparation for the upcoming change in government, the LTTE is strengthening its political presence by relocating LTTE sympathizers into unoccupied land around the main roads in Trincomalee and by promoting cultural propaganda like the "Tamil Nation Resurgence" movement.

COMMENT

19. (C/NF) In the 2001 general election some members of the military were accused of preventing voters from LTTE-controlled territory entering cleared areas to vote. It is reassuring to hear that the SLA is prepared to help ensure trouble-free voting for citizens crossing from LTTE-controlled territory to cast their ballots in this election, but a lot obviously depends on the Tigers themselves. We have heard (as AGA Charles suggested) the LTTE is not as interested in the outcome of this election compared to a parliamentary election. Our sense is that the LTTE is watching the campaign closely and that its leadership feels it has a critical stake in the result. How that influences Tiger behavior-whether it elicits a get-out-the-vote effort to support a particular candidate, as in the 2004 general election, or violent attacks aimed at eliminating a particular candidate, as in the last two presidential polls, remains the great unknown.

10. (C/NF) The familiar SLA refrain about the SLMM's "inability" to respond to CFA violations reflects a lack of understanding (willful or otherwise) that the SLMM's mandate is monitoring and reporting, nothing more. But, it also reflects the fact that the CFA was expected to last 3 - 6 months as a final peace deal was put in place. Instead it has remained in effect for three years - probably a record anywhere for CFA maintenance in the absence of a viable peace process. END COMMENT

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